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II.

CRÆSUS.

CRÆSUS, King of Lydia, was well-known to the Talmud and Midrash, and was quoted on account of his riches, for which he was celebrated in ancient history, and the name is used to designate a very rich Jew in the time of Trajan and Hadrian. This word occurs in several places¹ under the corrupt readings Chrosun, Chrosun, Chrosna, Chrosuth. Perles already called attention to the proper reading, חרסום, as being identical with Cræsus, but as to the contents of the passages where *Chræsus* is alluded to, we have arrived at different results. Having found the word spelled חרסות² or חרסות,³ we may assume the identity with Cræsus.

When did this rich Jew, called from his wealth *Cræsus*, live, and who was his son Eleazar or Elazar? We are told by the Talmud and Tossephta⁴ that Eleazar (Elazar) the son of Cræsus was high-priest in the time of the Second Commonwealth. He followed Ishmael the son of Phabi⁵ in the high-priesthood, which is to be concluded from the fact that he is mentioned after Ishmael ben Phabi. This is also affirmed by Josephus⁶:—"He (Tiberius) sent Valerius Gratus to be procurator of Judæa. This man deprived Ananus of the high-priesthood, and appointed Ishmael the son of Phabi to be high-priest. He also deposed him soon afterwards, and ordained Eleazar the son of Ananus, who had been high-priest before, to be high-priest, of which office, when he had held it for a year, Gratus deprived him," etc. The Talmud⁷ contradicts this statement by assigning Eleazar the son of Cræsus eleven years to officiate. The fact itself, however, that Eleazar the son of Ananus is identical with Eleazar the son of Cræsus, or in other words with Eleazar the very rich, seems to be unquestionable, only that while Josephus called him by his true name, the Talmud cited him by the surname derived from his riches, an account of which is given in another place,⁸ informing us that "he inherited from his father a thousand cities on the continent, and also a thousand ships on the sea." It is, therefore, obvious that "Eleazar son of Cræsus"

¹ *Joma* 9^a, 35^b; *Jerus. Joma* iii. 40^d; *Tossephta Joma*, end of ch. i.; *Tract. Semachoth*, ch. ix.; *Echa Rabb.* to בלע; *Kohel. Rabba* to יש אחר.

² See *Rabbinowitz Dikduke Soferim to Joma*, p. 44^b, and *Talkut* i. § 145, Ed. Salonich.

³ MS. Erfurt.

⁴ As quoted in foot-note 1.

⁵ פאיב or פאיב.

⁶ *Antiquities* XVIII. ii. 2.

⁷ *Joma* 9^a.

⁸ *Joma* 35^b; *Echa Rabbathi* to בלע.

is not a patronymic but an appellative name, called after his fabulous fortunes, which made him proverbial.¹

If Eleazar the rich high-priest lived in the age of Tiberius, we understand very well why the time of the rich Jew called Cræsus is called the time of persecution,² for Tiberius hated the Jews and persecuted them severely.³

There is, however, also mentioned⁴ a certain Gebine son of Cræsus, of whom it is said, that when his father died he asked his mother to show him his heritage. She consequently showed him a heap of gold, so big that while he stood on one side of it and the mother on the opposite side, they did not see each other, the heap of gold being between them. This narration serves us as an illustration of the verse,⁵ "There is one that is alone, and he has not a second, neither are his eyes satisfied with riches."

From this last sentence is the information derived that this rich man was blind, and thus he could not enjoy his marvellous wealth. The word "Gebine," signifying "deficiency of the eyesight,"⁶ is, therefore, well chosen as a *nomen appellativum*. To identify, however, this rich Gebine with our rich high-priest is impossible, for being afflicted with defective sight, he would not have been eligible for the high-priesthood according to Jewish Law. But he may have been a descendant of the Cræsus family, and possibly a grandson of our rich high-priest Eleazar.

This can be proved by the following.

In connection with this Gebine the rich, is related⁷ a strange statement to the effect that when Gebine the son of Cræsus died, Beltshazzar the Governor of Babylon was born.

Unquestionably Beltshazzar is here used as a disguised name for one of the Roman Emperors, as the author of the statement, R. Levi, did not wish to mention the real name of the Emperor.

Now in the apocryphal book of Judith, Trajan is called by the disguised name Beltshazzar.⁸ The same is the case when R. Joshua mentions⁹ certain Jewish martyrs executed by Nebuchadnezzar, which is likewise a disguised name for Trajan or Hadrian. And so we must undoubtedly understand by Beltshazzar of the Midrash either Trajan or Hadrian, who were both persecutors of the Jews. And thus the Midrash, desiring to point out the era of this event, that is,

¹ *Kiddushin* 49^b. See also *Tossephtha Kidd.*, ch. iii.

² *Semachoth*, ch. ix.

³ Grätz, *History*, iii., 211ff.

⁴ *Kohemoth Rabba* to וְיָשָׁא אֶת־.

⁵ Ecclesiastes iv. 8.

⁶ See our *Aruch Completum* II., 497.

⁷ *Kohemoth Rabba*, l.c.

⁸ Grätz, *History*, iv². 132.

⁹ *Tossephtha Edioth*, ch. iii, cf. Zebachim, 113a.

the time of the commencement of the persecution of the Jews, tells us that with the death of the rich Gebine, coincides the government of Beltshazzar, that means to say, began the persecution of the Jews by Trajan and Hadrian.

As the final result of our investigation we may take the fact that Croesus was an appellative name for a very rich Jew, as we would call a very rich man in our time Vanderbilt or Rothschild. One word more: "Bonus the son of Bonus" is mentioned in the Talmud¹ as a man possessing great wealth, and living in great luxury. I have shown elsewhere² that it is also an appellative name, taken from the Latin *bonus*, which means rich, and perhaps the owner of this appellative name belonged also to the same wealthy family of the Crœsuses.

¹ *Gittin*, 59a.

² *Aruch Completum*, vi. 10.
